SU 635 Be 642 131 161

had such a poor view of the strength of the Byelorussian national consciousness that they confined the Republic to a small border strip of 20,000 square miles and 1,500,000 inhabitants. Important Byelorussian districts with the towns of Vitebsk, Gomel and Mogilev remained within the R.S.F.S.R.

It took the Soviet central Government three years to transform the 'token republic' of Byelorussia into one which comprised the bulk of the Byelorussians living in a coherent territory in the western part of European Russia. On March 3rd, 1924, the Central Executive Committee of the U.S.S.R. issued a decree on the 'unification of all territories of the U.S.S.R. having a majority of Byelorussian population'. As a result of this decree the B.S.S.R. was able to enlarge its territory to 42,000 square miles and its population to 4,200,000.

Even after the 'unification decree' certain Byelorussian areas of the Soviet Union remained outside the B.S.S.R. and on December 6th, 1926, a new decree was published to rectify this situation by adding to Byelorussia some further territories including the town of Gomel. Through this second operation Byelorussia became a country of 48,000 square miles with nearly 5,000,000 inhabitants.

Be. [101]

The 1926 census showed that great confusion persisted in Byelorussia as to who was a Byelorussian and who was not. Thus out of 4,017,000 ethnical Byelorussians only 3,350,000 declared their language to be Byelorussian. On the other hand the census recorded only 383,000 Great Russians in Byelorussia, although 1,165,000 people considered Great Russian as their language.

Be. 565 464

The basic difficulty which the Soviet régime encountered among the Byelorussians was, however, not the language question, but the fact that the Byelorussian people had hardly any 'revolutionary vanguard' in the form of an industrial proletariat worth mentioning. The five predominantly Byelorussian Governments ('Gubernyas') of the Czarist Empire had in 1913 but 69,000 industrial workers of whom by no means all belonged to the Byelorussian people.

Be. 162 369

Although Soviet statistics claimed that Byelorussian industry increased twenty-one-fold between 1913 and 1937, industrialization and urbanization made less progress in Byelorussia than in most other parts of European Russia. The major Byelorussian towns did not share in the general speedy growth of Soviet cities, nor did any new 'mushroom towns' emerge. Of the 174 towns of the Soviet Union which in 1939 had over 50,000 inhabitants only five were in Byelorussia and the largest Byelorussian town, Minsk, occupied the thirty-second place among the cities of the U.S.S.R. Byelorussia's towns were in the inter-war period only partially Byelorussian from the ethnical point of view, since they all had very large Jewish populations and included also a considerable number of Great Russians. In 1926 Minsk had 43·6 per cent Jewish

21: Kolarz J-4 (no date) 1952 R1 Soviet Union
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inhabitants against 40·8 per cent Byelorussians and 7·3 per cent Great Russians. In Vitebsk, the second largest town, there were 45 per cent Jews, 30 per cent Byelorussians and 20 per cent Great Russians. Gomel, the third largest, had 40 per cent Jews, 29 per cent Great Russians and 22 per cent Byelorussians, and Mogilev 52·5 per cent Byelorussians and 39 per cent Jews.

The insignificance of Byelorussian industry and the absence of any Byelorussian town life worth mentioning explains to a great extent the difficulties which the Soviet régime experienced both on the political and on the cultural front in the Byelorussian S.S.R.

For a long time the communist leadership was unable to convince the more outstanding representatives of the Byelorussian people that class struggle had to be conducted in Byelorussia just as anywhere else in the Soviet Union. The leading Byelorussian intellectuals, who had close ties with the destitute peasant masses of their people, proclaimed the so-called *Bezburzhuaznost* (the non-existence of a bourgeoisie) of the Byelorussian nation. At the same time the Byelorussian nationalists or *Natsdemy* (National Democrats), as they were officially nicknamed, were profoundly pro-Western and anti-Russian in their outlook. They did not even like to be described as 'Byelorussians' or 'White Russians' since these terms simply degraded them, in their view, into a species of 'Russians'. They advocated in the twenties that the Byelorussians should be called *Krivichi*, thus identifying themselves with a Slav people inhabiting the territory of Byelorussia 1,000 years ago. The central Government opposed this suggestion. The Byelorussians had to keep the name which already externally associated them with the Great Russians. Nevertheless, the Byelorussian intelligentsia persisted in cultivating an ideology which maintained that no close relationship existed between the Byelorussians and Great Russians and that the former did not belong to the Eastern Slavs owing to their different origin, history and the character of their culture.[31] This Western orientation of the Byelorussian intelligentsia also had repercussions in the field of linguistics and led to the attempt to create a Byelorussian scientific terminology different from the Russian.

During the twenties, the communist régime did comparatively little against the nationalist tendencies in Byelorussia. In the absence of any communists capable of making a contribution to Byelorussian cultural life, the régime was forced during a certain time to leave the artistic and scientific activities of the nation in the hands of 'bourgeois nationalists'. Only towards the end of the twenties did the régime start purging the various cultural institutions of the country, and it was only in 1933 that the persecution of Byelorussian nationalism assumed major proportions. The year 1933 saw the discovery of the 'Byelorussian National Centre' which was charged with aiming at the establishment of a 'Byelorussian